

CHEQUERED CAREER OF WILHELMENA HARTERT,

AS ... A ... MARRIAGE ... BROKER ... IN ... GERMAN ... HIGH ... SOCIETY.



Madame Hartert

Though a Scavenger's Daughter and Widow of a Waiter, She Had No Trouble to Break Into Circles of High Society.

Berlin, Dec. 17. AFTER considerable difficulty it has just been possible to secure the accompanying portrait of Madame Wilhelmina Hartert, the usurer and matrimonial agent, whose surprising career in German high society was recently exposed in the Berlin criminal court. Sent with this article, too, is a portrait of Baron Netzelbladt, the young German nobleman who preferred to commit suicide rather than comply with the terms of the adventures, to whom he owed money. These were that the baron should marry an heiress indicated by Madame Hartert, and settle his debt out of his wife's dowry. At her trial it was proved that the usurer, who kept up a superb establishment in Berlin, had made half a million dollars by getting young aristocrats into her clutches, and then arranging marriages for them and taking a "rakeoff."

Considering her low birth, lack of education and refinement, and initial impecuniosity, the rapidity with which Madame Hartert forced her way into Berlin society and secured an influential

social position is truly amazing. She is the daughter of a street scavenger, who piled his unsavory occupation in the German capital for thirty years, while her mother began her career as maid-of-all-work in a common lodging house and ended it as a washerwoman. Madame Hartert gained her education partly in the public state schools, where attendance is compulsory up to the age of fourteen, and partly in the vice-laden streets of Berlin. Following her mother's footsteps she began as a domestic servant and drifted at an early age into the employment of smart single women who lived alone without chaplains.

Studied Social Usages.

In these luxurious houses, the future Madame Hartert gradually became familiar with the manners and customs of men and women about town. She observed how formal and informal calls are made, how people behave in smart society, how a table is laid for dinner, in brief, how a household is conducted on fashionable lines. At the age of twenty-five she married a waiter named Hartert and accompanied him to London and Paris, whither the ups and downs of his trade led him.

In this way the scavenger's daughter gained a practical knowledge of languages and a wider acquaintance with the manners and customs of other countries. Hartert, the waiter, was a drunken vagabond and went through a long period of unemployment in London, at the conclusion of which he blew his brains out in a fit of depression. Left alone, penniless, and with formidable debts to pay, Madame Hartert fled to Berlin, where she sought employment of various kinds without success.

Disappointed in her efforts, she conceived the idea of exploiting the weaknesses of high society with which she had become acquainted before and after her marriage. By pure audacity she succeeded in taking a large house in a fashionable street in the most aristocratic quarter of Berlin, though she had not a single cent in her pocket to pay the rent. She contrived to persuade the owner of the house that she was a wealthy woman in momentary financial difficulty, and having secured the house was equally successful in inducing tradesmen to furnish it and fit it up in a sumptuously luxurious manner on credit. Having progressed thus far, it was comparatively easy to obtain dresses and the best of everything on the same system. Finally, by pledging the contents of her house, which, of course, were not hers to pledge, Madame Hartert borrowed \$5,000 from a professional money-lender to use as working capital in her projected occupation.

Played a Dangerous Game.

Her next move was to secure admittance into good circles of society. She rented a pew at a fashionable church



One Of Madame Hartert's Victims.

and was unfailing in her attendance on Sunday mornings and evenings. She subscribed to charities, and took an active part in bazaars arranged for benevolent purposes. Soon people began to take an interest in the widow whose dress was immaculate, and who seemed to have command of unlimited supplies of money. But Madame Hartert was playing a dangerous game. The five thousand dollars which she had borrowed approached exhaustion at a very early stage of her career. She paid \$200 toward her house rent, \$1,000 to her dressmakers and \$1,500 on account to her furnishers, leaving only \$2,000 to launch herself into society.

Her efforts were successful in that direction, however, and in a remarkable short period of time, Madame Hartert's house became the resort of numerous men and women belonging to the upper classes of society. There were plenty of penniless young men of noble birth who offered themselves as candidates for the hand of the supposedly wealthy widow. It was among this class of visitors that Madame Hartert secured her victims. Posing as a good friend who was inclined to help them out of their financial embarrassments, Madame Hartert offered to procure loans for them from professional money-lenders, offering herself to be their security.

A typical case of this kind was exposed in the course of the recent trial. One of Madame Hartert's visitors was Baron Maltzahn, a lieutenant in the German army, who soon confided to her that he was threatened by ruin because he could not pay debts amounting to \$25,000. Madame Hartert said to Baron Maltzahn: "I cannot lend you this amount myself, but my credit will enable me to borrow it from a money-lender for you. Your own credit is so bad that you cannot possibly borrow the money yourself. I will give the money-lender a promissory note and you can give one to me for the same amount. I fear little else in doing you this favor because I know that you as an officer will certainly pay your debts to a lady."

Profitable Note Brokerage.

Madame Hartert then borrowed \$15,000 from a money lender, giving him a promissory note for \$17,000 in return. Two days later she informed Baron

Maltzahn that she had been able to get the required sum of \$15,000, but that she had been compelled to give the money lender a promissory note for \$25,000 payable in three months. Baron Maltzahn, who was a careless young fellow, accordingly gave Madame Hartert a promissory note for \$25,000 and the two became better friends than ever. As the time approached for the repayment of the sum to Madame Hartert, Baron Maltzahn, whose expectations in other directions were disappointed, began to grow extremely uneasy and Madame Hartert carefully fostered his distress by telling him that she could not possibly repay the money lender and that all her furniture would be distrained unless he fulfilled his obligations at the appointed time.

One day when Baron Maltzahn was confessing the impossibility of finding the money Madame Hartert remarked to him: "Your only chance is marriage with a wealthy woman. If you are willing to extricate yourself from all your difficulties and to save me from ruin in this way I will arrange through some matrimonial agency to have you introduced to houses where there are heiresses eligible for marriage." Baron Maltzahn accepted the proposal and Madame Hartert persuaded another friend of hers, named Count Koenigsdorf, to introduce him to the house of a wealthy Jew named Rosenfeld.

Saved by Rich Marriage.

Madame Hartert told Baron Maltzahn and persuaded him to believe that the matrimonial agent, who actually did not exist, had compelled her to give him a written promise to pay him \$5,000 on the day on which Baron Maltzahn married the heiress, Miss Rosenfeld. Baron Maltzahn accordingly gave Madame Hartert a written promise to pay her \$25,000 for the imaginary matrimonial agent on the day on which he married Miss Rosenfeld. In due course Baron Maltzahn proposed to and was accepted by Miss Rosenfeld and the wedding took place after a brief engagement. Miss



Rosenfeld received a dowry of \$300,000, half of which, according to the terms of the marriage contract, was immediately paid to her husband. Baron Maltzahn immediately paid \$25,000 to Madame Hartert for the phantom matrimonial agent and another \$5,000 for the money lender to whom Madame Hartert was only obliged to pay \$17,000. Madame Hartert consequently secured a clear profit of \$32,500 on this astute double transaction.

Madame Hartert followed the same method with such modifications as were necessary to individual cases for many years. All this time she lived in truly royal luxury, and her house on the Magdeburger Platz was the center of much brilliant social activity and the scene of numerous social successes. For a long time each one of her young victims believed that she was conducting financial and matrimonial transactions for him alone, and no one had the least idea that she was plying a thriving trade as a financial and matrimonial agent.

Preferred Suicide to Dishonor.

She was universally regarded as a wealthy and benevolent widow whose husband had left her an immense for-

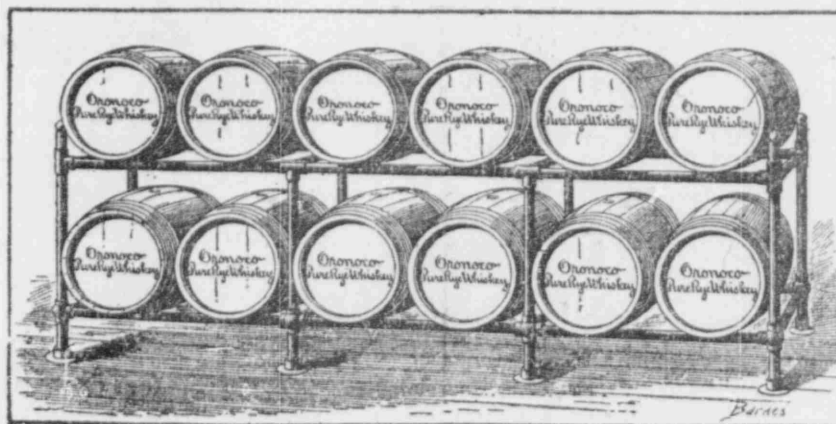
fortune. In the course of a decade Madame Hartert amassed a fortune of \$500,000 through her financial and matrimonial deals. Her methods were finally exposed when one of her victims, Baron Netzelbladt committed suicide and left a long letter explaining that he preferred death to paying Madame Hartert a big proportion of the private fortune of any rich woman whom he might marry.

The letter found its way into the newspapers, and Madame Hartert's house suddenly became deserted. The public prosecutor took the matter up, and brought an action against her on various charges of fraud and usury. The prosecution broke down on technical legal points, and Madame Hartert was acquitted. Her career in Berlin has been terminated, but her fortune of half a million dollars will enable her to start life afresh under agreeable auspices in some country where the story of her transactions in the German capital is unknown. GEORGE WEISS.

Reputation Built on Quality



It's Up to You.



EDWARD J. QUINN,

604 Pa. Ave. N. W. Phone 761.



A Trial Will Convince.

A Select Assortment of California Wines.

All Out-of-town Orders Packed in Neat, Unlettered Boxes.